

EVERYONE WINS WHEN **EVERYONE IS COUNTED**



AMERICAN INDIANS & ALASKA NATIVES COUNT!



UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITY IN CALIFORNIA

California has the largest count (723,225 individuals) and percentage (14%) of those who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) alone or in combination with another race compared to the rest of the nation.¹

There are 109 federally-recognized Indian tribes in California and 78 entities petitioning for recognition. Tribes in California currently have nearly 100 separate reservations or Rancherias. Additionally, California has the largest urban concentrations of AIANs in the country.² In California, 89 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in urban areas. Los Angeles County has the largest American Indian and Alaska Native population (156,325 individuals) in the nation.³ **Yet, there is significant census undercounting of AIANs throughout the country.** According to the 2010 census, there was a census net undercount of AIAN alone or in combination on reservations of -4.88, the highest undercount of any population in the country.

Undercounts, in previous censuses, have harmed funding for key tribal programs. Accurate census counts are critical to ensuring that tribes and urban AIAN communities are allocated the appropriate amount of funds for health, housing, and other crucial programs. AIANs also need accurate census data to plan appropriately for how to effectively use their limited resources.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT

American Indians/Alaska Natives have faced a long history of colonization and significant discrimination—and thus are likely to distrust the government. Despite an inherent trust obligation to provide health care, education, and other services in exchange for land and natural resources, the first treaties were broken dating back to the 1800s. Subsequent government policies such as the Indian Removal Act, the Dawes Act, and the Assimilation, Termination, and Relocation eras undermined tribal sovereignty and paved a path for economic insecurity, profound trauma, and poor health. Continued federal attempts to undermine tribal environmental and land rights persist today, adding to further mistrust of government.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER (CONTINUED)

DISBURSED GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITY

Unlike other racial/ethnic groups, AIANs do not have racial/ethnic enclaves in urban or suburban areas. This was due to the Federal Relocation Act, which strategically placed AIAN families away from one another so as not to form a Native neighborhood. The lack of geographic concentration is a barrier to enumeration for this community. It is impossible to serve a large proportion of the AIAN community with traditional outreach methods in a few centralized places, and the small numbers in any particular location make it difficult and costly to design culturally-appropriate and effective outreach strategies to meet their needs.

ADDITIONAL HARD-TO-COUNT FACTORS

- Poor maps of Rancherias and reservations as well as individuals living in unconventional housing units (living in RV parks; seemingly abandoned buildings) pose challenges to enumeration.
- There are very different issues in rural as compared to urban populations for these groups. In rural areas, issues are similar to other small, remote locations in general. In urban areas, issues are similar to other urban poor.
- AIANs are particularly difficult to match to administrative records.
- AIANs experience a digital divide. Overall, according to census data, 58.2% of American Indians use the internet, which is low compared to the average White household. Some remote locations have little internet access. Cell phone coverage may be equally poor in some areas as well.
- For those tribes that still rely on subsistence living (ex: Yurok and salmon fishing) it is often difficult to get accurate counts because they are carrying out subsistence activities and/or living in fish camps versus traditional housing.
- AIANs experience high rates of homelessness, transient/mobile living, multi-family households, temporary households, and are living in “group quarters” (e.g. incarcerated, hospitalized, etc.).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work closely with AIAN community leaders and AIAN community-based organizations. Outreach strategies should include both traditional media (print, radio, television), social media, and digital media.
- Establish Questionnaire Assistance Centers at local Indian Health Service clinics or AIAN community-based organizations.
- Engage with tribal governments and provide Census 2020 technical assistance.
- Hire enumerators from local reservations, Rancherias and/or urban communities who know their community and best practices to reach/engage communities members.
- Ensure enumerators understand that citizens of state-recognized tribes can and should self-identify as AIAN.
- Provide media and outreach materials that are culturally relevant. AIAN are diverse and require different outreach materials and strategies based on geographical location.
- Appropriately fund all recognized tribal governments in California to conduct census outreach within their communities, both on and off the reservation/rancheria.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf>
- 2 <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>
- 3 https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_00_SF4_PCT002&prodType=table

For more information about the Census Policy Advocacy Network, please contact
CPAN@AdvanceProj.org or visit
AdvancementProjectCA.org/CPAN